

IDEAS WORLD AFFAIRS

An Execution Binge in Iran

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Activists gather in front of the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin during the 'United Against Executions in Iran' protest on Jan. 27, 2024. Echo Iran/Middle East Images/Getty Images

BY **NAZANIN BONIADI AND ROYA BOROUMAND** JANUARY 31, 2024 5:15 PM EST

IDEAS

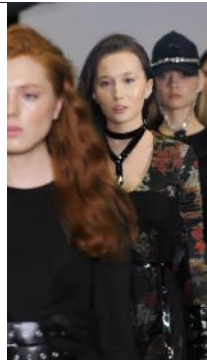
Nazanin Boniadi is an Iranian-born human rights activist, actress and 2023 Sydney Peace Prize Laureate. Roya Boroumand is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran.

The Islamic Republic authorities in Iran are going on an execution binge, using the spiraling instability and conflicts in the Middle East — in which they are complicit — as a smokescreen for their crimes against the Iranian people.

On January 22, the mother of **Mohammad Ghobadlou**, a 23-year-old street protester in the “Woman Life Freedom” uprising in Iran, made an emotional **videotape** pleading for her son’s life to be spared. Ghobadlou was bipolar and

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Despite this, his execution took place a day after his mother's appeal, with only a 12-hour notice to his lawyer because Iran's Chief Justice vetoed the retrial and made sure Ghobadlou was secretly sentenced to death. This is not the first nor the last execution carried out in Iran in flagrant violation of the Islamic Republic's international human rights obligations, and with utter contempt for the rule of law. He is at least the ninth protester to be executed in connection to the 2022 protests. Farhad Salimi, an Iranian Kurdish political prisoner subjected to torture-tainted "confession" and whose decade-long pleas for a fair retrial were ignored, was arbitrarily executed on the same day as Ghobadlou. Less than a week after their execution, four more Kurdish dissidents who were forcibly disappeared in July 2022 — Pejman Fatehi, Mohsan Mazloun, Mohammad Hazhir Faramarzi and Wafa Azarbar — were **also executed** after grossly unfair and secretive trials, and allegations of torture. Adding insult to injury, the authorities are **refusing** to return the bodies to the families for burial.

A **labor strike** has ensued in Iran's Kurdistan, in protest against these abhorrent state murders, and in opposition to the death penalty this regime has used disproportionately against Iran's persecuted ethnic and religious minorities.



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These dissidents, like the thousands of political prisoners put to death by Iran in the past four-and-a-half decades, were killed in order to spread fear among an increasingly restless and defiant population. The more than 800 people reportedly executed there in 2023 was the highest per capita in the world. The rate has ramped up, and the usual international condemnations or efforts to engage Iran have not been effective enough to stop the carnage. Why? Because outside Iran, the political cost of the Islamic Republic's crimes and repression is too insignificant to stop its leaders. So, they continue to kill.

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There are limits to what activists inside Iran can do to stop the regime's execution machine. After Ghobadlou's execution, 61 women political prisoners in Evin Prison, including the anti-death penalty activist and 2023 Nobel Peace Laureate Narges Mohammadi, commenced a hunger strike, calling for the end of executions in Iran. But the prisoners' sacrifices can only be effective if the international community supports their demand.

The world must show the Islamic Republic authorities that deliberately and slowly breaking the necks of 806 individuals--hanging is the official manner of execution--in one year is simply intolerable, and neither "business as usual," or diplomatic relations and engagement can continue. Iranians who are risking their very lives to oppose state violence deserve assurances from the international community that they are not on their own.

Global lawmakers should publicly support the political prisoners who are on hunger strike behind their prison walls to stop executions in Iran. This must demand an immediate moratorium on the death penalty, and call for the mandate of the UN Fact Finding Mission to Iran investigating the 2022 death in custody of Jina Mahsa Amini and the ensuing protests — which has been denied information and access to Iran — be extended beyond March 2024. We must call for the UN Human Rights Commissioner's representatives, scheduled to travel to Iran on February 2, 2024, to postpone their trip so as not to enable the Islamic Republic authorities to deceive the international community by feigning cooperation with international human rights bodies, and that they make any trip contingent upon the Iranian authorities agreeing to a moratorium on the death penalty and granting unrestricted access to the political prisoners of their choice, including those on death row, and to victims' families.

As the Iranian people continue to risk everything to stand for their most fundamental rights in defiance of their unrepresentative and incorrigible authorities, the United Nations and its member states have a moral obligation to prevent their human rights mechanisms from being undermined and

manipulated by the Islamic Republic, to legitimize itself on the world stage and continue its atrocities unrestrained.

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